

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR BLOG

Employer strategies to end gender-based violence and harassment at work

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In addition to providing a safe and equitable workplace, employers have a major role to play in ensuring their workplaces are respectful environments free of gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH). Preventing GBVH at work is also good for business. It reduces staff turnover, increases productivity, creates a safer work environment for all workers and saves money.

Here are four strategies that employers can use as they create policies, programs and procedures that prevent and mitigate GBVH in the world of work:

1. Add gender to your occupational safety and health policies and protocols.

Employers have an obligation to ensure their workplaces are safe for workers. GBVH is an issue that can lead to unsafe conditions that could have physical and psychological impacts on workers' safety and health. Employers can help mitigate GBVH by viewing GBVH prevention and response through the lens of workplace health and safety and by addressing GBVH in their health and safety policies and protocols.

Earlier this year, the Women's Bureau partnered with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) Host a forum on GBVH in construction as a workplace safety and health issue, highlighting the long-lasting physical and psychological impacts of GBVH on workers' health and safety. During the webinar on GBVH in the construction industry, a representative from FemPro Construction highlighted the strategies that employers can use to mitigate GBVH on their jobsites, such as partnering with the Policy Group on Tradeswomen's Issues to host events for tradeswomen to discuss their job environments. During these events, tradeswomen identified a need for a tradeswoman advocate and further called action created this role to support businesses working on their trades projects.

Risk assessments, including risk assessments can help employers identify factors that could contribute to GBVH on their worksites. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission published a chart of risk factors for harassment and responder strategies that employers can use to mitigate risks. For example, having intimacy educators in film and TV sets helps mitigate the risk of harassment associated with power dynamics, isolated workplaces and performing hyper-exposed work. This is an important safety factor for the actors, but also for the production company.

2. Strengthen workplace policies to include GBVH.

Procedural policies are as important tool for employees because they ensure that procedures, protections and rights are clearly defined to all employees. They can also demonstrate an employer's commitment to inclusivity,



safety and equity. Many employers currently have a workplace policy that addresses harassment in the workplace, but employers should broaden the scope to include any type of GBV. Effective workplace policies are also victim- and survivor-centered, readily accessible to all employees, and clearly define policies and procedures specific to the workplace.

Employers can reference model policies while collaborating with their employees to tailor a GBV policy to fit the specific needs of their workplace. For assistance, violence-in-the-workplace resources from the Domestic Violence Center offers several resources, model materials and training for employers to strengthen their workplace policies. The City of New York has published a domestic and gender-based violence (DGBV) workplace policy for all city agencies to provide them with tailored responses to incidents experiencing GBV. And the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence has developed their Toolkit on domestic violence and the workplace, which offers employer-led policies and practices to create a safe and supportive work environment for survivors.

Adopt International best practices

There are several international best practices and models that employers in the United States can adopt to strengthen their prevention of and response to GBV. Employees from around the world, alongside workers and governments, played a key role in the development, adoption and implementation of International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 190 (C190), the first international standard on gender-based violence and harassment in the world of work. The ILO subsequently published guidance for employers to create appropriate workplace policies and systems that address GBV. The guide includes important definitions and examples, sections on the benefits of taking action and employer responsibilities, policy examples and more.

Another best practice for employers, as demonstrated by legislation passed in many countries around the world and in several U.S. cities and states, is providing paid leave—known as survivor, safe leave or abuse-protected and paid leave from work for survivors and their family members related to the violence they've experienced. ILO Recommendation 194, which supplements ILO C190, includes leave for survivors of domestic violence as a best practice.

The Global Agreement, signed in 2012, and the ILO Health Agreement, signed in 2018, are two international examples of how workers, unions, employers and governments can come together to address and mitigate GBV. These enforceable binding agreements aim to reduce “temporal GBV” in government facilities and condition doing business with the supplier to the business’ acceptance of worker-led programs to end GBV. Employers and businesses in the U.S. can use these binding agreements as a model to ensure their workplaces are free of GBV.

Provide regular trainings on GBV for all employees

Training is a key component of changing the culture of an organization because it increases communication about GBV, ensures that all workers know their rights and provides access to information that can help the organization effectively prevent and respond to GBV. Employers should ensure that they are providing regular trainings on GBV to ALL employees. Effective GBV trainings are in-person, trauma-informed, survivor-centered and co-created with workers and occur at least once per year for all employees. The trainings should also be conducted by experienced trainers who have expertise in addressing GBV and creating trauma-informed and survivor-centered spaces.

Kids Safe is an example of an organization that is working with businesses to train workers in the hospitality industry about how to create safe, inclusive environments free of GBV in alcohol-serving establishments. Their trainings are survivor-centered and use terminology and examples that are based on the real-life experiences of survivors and bartenders. Employers Against Domestic Violence is a Massachusetts organization that is working with employers to develop tailored workplace policies and trainings related to their human management, supervisors and employees about the impacts of domestic violence in the workplace.

Amy DelVecchio and Kate Mooney, Policy Analysts at the U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau; Roger Fornari, Bureau Director, working families, gender-based violence, harassment.

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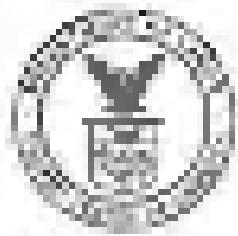
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